

1. [Character Education: A Critical Analysis; Robert Tatman, Stacey Edmonson, John Slate](#)
2. [Character Education: A Critical Analysis; Robert Tatman, Stacey Edmonson, John Slate](#)
3. [Teach and model Morals, Values and Character](#)

Character Education: A Critical Analysis; Robert Tatman, Stacey Edmonson, John Slate

In this article, we examined the history behind character education because we believe that character education an integral component of the educational enterprise. Major contributors to the importance of character education in the 18th, 19th, and 20th centuries were discussed. Then we focused on the highlights of the last five decades of the 20th century. Finally, we examined recent developments in character education, with particular interest to character education programs.



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Introduction

Dewey (1944) framed a rich historical context when he wrote that, “It is a commonplace of educational theory that the establishing of character is a comprehensive aim of school instruction and discipline” (p. 346).

Poignantly closing his book *Democracy and Education* with a reference to a moral education in school, Dewey (1944) wrote that, “All education which develops power to share effectively in social life is moral...Interest in learning from all the contacts of life is the essential moral interest” (p. 360). Thus, for Dewey, a school’s moral mission emerged from students’ social empowerment which resulted from continuous learning.

Recent character education endeavors across the educational landscape have originated from a variety of different organizational sources. The Center for the 4th and 5th Rs (Respect and Responsibility) “promotes a comprehensive approach to character education, one that uses all phases of school life as opportunities for character development” (Lickona & Davidson, 2005, p. 2). The Center, directed by Lickona, has increased its attention to character development at the high school level as reflected in the Smart & Good High Schools report published in 2005 (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Character Education Partnership (CEP) based in Washington, DC, was founded in 1993, and is a “national coalition of educators, parents, organizations, community groups, and companies dedicated to promoting character education as a means of creating a more civil, just, and compassionate society” (Lickona & Davidson, 2005, p.2). Organizational partners include the American Association of School Administrators (AASA), the Association of Supervision and Curriculum Development (ASCD), the National Council for Social Studies (NCSS), the National School Boards Association (NSBA), and the National PTA (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Character education is integral to the educational enterprise. Chang (1994) described teaching as “moral by nature” (p. 81), and Sockett (1993) purported that “moral character matters in teaching” (p. 14). Goodlad, Soder, and Sirotnik (1990) contended that, “Teaching is a fundamentally moral enterprise in which adults ask and require children to change in directions chosen by adults” (p. 264). The historic mission of education is emphasized by Doyle (1997) who noted that, “To abandon education’s historic mission to shape character...flies in the face of history and reason” (¶ 10). Brooks and Thompson (2005) quoting Ginott wrote that, “Reading, writing and arithmetic are important only if they serve to make our children more humane” (p. 51).

Progress of Character Education

Huffman (1993) wrote that, “our early schools treated the transmission of knowledge as secondary to character development. Students needed to be literate in order to read the Bible” (p. 24). As Bruce (2004) so aptly noted, character education is nothing new and has been around as long as there

have been schools. Character development is one aspect of the great tradition that had its origins in the ancient and primitive cultures, and was a tradition that, “was concerned with good habits of conduct as contrasted with moral concepts” (Wynne, 1986, p. 4).

To illustrate, Doyle (1997) set the historical framework for character education when writing that “From the time of the ancient Greek to sometime in the late 19th century, a singular idea obtained: education’s larger purpose was to shape character, to make men (and later, women) better people” (§ 2). Character education is reflected in a historically rich context with advocates including Plato, Aristotle, Kant, and Dewey (Heslep, 1995). Part of democratic thought throughout history, the formal teaching of morals and values, extends back to both Plato and Aristotle in fourth century B.C. who understood that the purpose of education was to train good and virtuous citizens (Skinner, 2004).

In the latter half of the 5th century B.C., Isocrates, a Greek sophist considered to be the father of education, wrote his summary conclusion and the goals of education in his *Panathenaicus*. An educated person, according to Isocrates, is one who manages daily circumstances well, and demonstrates accurate judgment, decency, goodness, honor, and good-nature. The educated individual also exhibits slowness to take offense, discipline in pleasures, braveness under misfortune, and humility in success (Carus, 2004). Isocrates believed that those persons who possess all of such virtues to be truly educated, as well as both wise and complete.

Wood and Roach (1999) noted that “for centuries educators have talked about the role of education in teaching values” (p. 213). In United States history, McClellan (1992) traced the importance and the vital purpose of character education. The term character education has also been discussed for years and refers to a planned, comprehensive, and systematic approach to teach values such as self-respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, and citizenship. Houston (1998) stated that character education has a central role to play in school reform. Berman (1998) noted that, “Nurturing a democratic culture and a civil society was the central mission of public education at its inception” (§ 5). Houston prioritized both character and civility as not simply esoteric or structured as add-ons in the school

curriculum; they are “central to our mission and to our very survival as an institution and a society” (§ 6).

Referencing the seventeenth century democratic philosopher, John Locke, Skinner (2004) illustrated how Locke viewed learning as secondary to virtue when noting that, “Reading and writing and learning I allow to be necessary, but yet not the chief business [of education]. I imagine you would think him a very foolish fellow, that should not value a virtuous or a wise man infinitely before a great scholar” (p. 1). “If our nation is to repossess its civic soul, it needs to recapture the central civic responsibilities of public schools...” (Barber, 1998; Civic Literacy section, § 1).

Eighteenth Century

In the 1700s, parents in the early days of the Republic “valued character, and they expected public schools to help their children become both smart and good (Josephson, 2002, p. 42). Educators were aligned with parents in this educational thrust. According to Josephson, educators “embraced this responsibility gladly. There was no effort to separate the teaching of knowledge from the teaching of virtue” (p. 42). Educators of this era also connected the moral education of schools with the success of the new American democracy (Josephson). Benjamin Franklin understood moral education to be mankind serving one’s country, friends, and family. Connecting moral sensibilities and good habits with the survival of Colonial America democracy, Ryan (2003) proposed the purpose of the era’s common schools:

In Colonial America, common schools were brought into existence for an ostensibly moral purpose. Our Founding Fathers were profoundly aware that the health of the new democracy would rest on the virtues of its people. Worried that their fledgling experiment would fail, they called for the spread of education – an education that would instruct the young in the moral sensibilities and good habits needed to sustain not only their own lives, but also a healthy democracy. (§ 3)

By the latter part of the 18th century and early part of the 19th century, Ryan (1993) recorded that the early educational pioneers understood that a very diverse and multicultural America needed, “a school system that would teach the civic virtues necessary to maintain our novel political and social experiment” (p. 16). The school would help students understand what being good meant, and teach the habits needed for democratic citizenship.

The Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, adopted in 1780, is the oldest written constitution still in effect in the world today. The document, written by John Adams, Samuel Adams, and James Bowdoin, called for public institutions to promote:

agriculture, arts, sciences, ..., to countenance and inculcate the principles of humanity and general benevolence, public and private charity, industry and frugality, honesty and punctuality in their dealings; sincerity, good humor, and all social affections, and generous sentiments among the people.
(Constitution of the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 1780, Chapter V)

The founders of William and Mary College proposed that “the youth of Virginia should be well educated to learning and good morals” (Education, 1968, p. 370). Thomas Jefferson’s Rockfish Gap Commission reported on the multiple goals of the proposed University of Virginia in 1818 in the form of 12 objectives. Several objectives dealt with students’ character. Students, for example, were to improve their morals and faculties by reading, understand their duties to both neighbors and the country, and to form in students both the “habits of reflection and correct action, rendering them examples of virtue to others and of happiness within themselves” (Education, 1968, p. 370). Summarizing both the 18th and 19th centuries, Barber (1998) noted that:

The common schools movement informed our 19th century educational practices with a sense of civic mission that left no school or college untouched. Not just the land grant colleges, but nearly every higher educational institution founded in the 18th and 19th centuries—religious as well as secular, private no less than public—counted among its leading founding principles a dedication to training competent and responsible citizens. (§ 4)

The precedent for a consensual concern for character and citizenry knowledge and practice would guide America's educational goals, curricula, and pedagogies through the end of the sixth decade of the 20th century.

Nineteenth Century

Education in the 1800s adhered to a direct approach incorporating student discipline, the teacher's example, and the daily school curriculum (Lickona, 1993). Character educators enjoyed a consensus with curriculum utilizing the Bible as the source for both moral and religious instruction. Following controversies with Bible and doctrine choices, educators turned to McGuffey Readers that "retained many favorite Biblical stories but added poems, exhortations, and heroic tales" (Lickona, 1993, p. 6). Clarity of mission characterized textbooks of the 1800s. Levy (2000) noted:

Nineteenth-century textbooks were clear on civic virtues. They promoted love of country, love of God, duty to parents, thrift, honesty and hard work. These characteristics were designed to encourage youngsters to support the accumulation of property, the certainty of progress, and the perfection of the United States. Schoolbooks were meant to train the child's character. (p. 14)

Noddings (2005) gave a historical context to education in the early 1800s by noting that, "Public schools in the United States – as well as schools across different societies and historical eras – were established as much for moral and social reasons as for academic instruction" (p. 10).

In Thomas Jefferson's 1818 Report of the Commissioners for the University of Virginia, the 'objects of primary education' included such qualities as, "morals, understanding of duties to neighbors and country, knowledge of rights, and intelligence and faithfulness in social relations" (Noddings, 2005, p. 10). In his Pedagogic Creed of 1897, Dewey understood that all education proceeded from individuals' participation in the social consciousness of the race and that this unconscious education resulted in students also sharing in humanity's collective intellectual and moral resources (Education, 1968, p. 373).

Twentieth Century

The twentieth century saw educators implementing proactive steps to ensure character development. Early in the century, Krajewski and Bailey (1999) wrote that public education was not without moral and ethical guidance for: In 1918 the Commission on Reorganization of Secondary Education recommended seven Cardinal Principles: health, worthy home membership, command of fundamental academic skills, vocation, citizenship, worthy use of leisure time, and ethical character. The Commission members viewed the high school as an agency to advance all aspects of life. (p. 33)

Million (2005) noted, however, how moral education, which was integral to public schools in early America, eroded in the 1940 and 1950 decades because of educators prioritizing academics above an educational focus on morals teaching. Another educational shift occurred in the 1960s and 1970s placing the education of students in the moral domain to a historic low (Million, 2005).

John Dewey, this century's educational spokesperson, wrote that, "the best and the deepest moral training is that which one gets by having to enter into proper relations with others," and that "present educational systems, so far as they destroy or neglect this unity, render it difficult or impossible to get any regular, moral training" (Gilness, 2003, p. 243). Moral training, however, endured many philosophical onslaughts throughout the duration of the century due to the rise of a variety of philosophical forces that were all responsible in part to eroding the consensus supporting character education (Lickona, 1993). As presented in by Lickona (1993), the century witnessed the rise of Darwinism, logical positivism, personalism, pluralism, and both values clarification and moral reasoning. Darwinism projected the idea that morality and every-thing else was in flux.

One of the philosophical forces from Europe that reshaped the character education of the 1900s was logical positivism. The dichotomous view of logical positivism replaced the curriculum consensus of the previous century. Logical positivism "asserted a radical distinction between facts (which could be scientifically proven) and values (which positivism held were mere expressions of feeling, not objective truth)" (Lickona, 1993, p.

6). Positivism did not leave morality unaffected in that morality was now “relativized and privatized –made to seem a matter of personal ‘value judgment,’ not a subject for public debate and transmission through the schools” (Lickona, p. 6).

1950s

In the 1950s, “schools were expected to reflect the best values of their communities” (Smith, 1989, p. 34). Character education termed ‘character development’ in this decade taught a clear difference between right and wrong, told stories which taught hard work and loyalty, and presented clear lessons of American patriotism. In the late 1950s, “Harvard psychologist Lawrence Kohlberg began to overthrow the behaviorism dominating the academy of the time” (Hymowitz, 2003, ¶ 3). Changing the source of moral behavior, Hymowitz noted that “Kohlberg introduced a new theory of moral development that prized rational thinking and autonomous judgment as the source of moral behavior” (¶ 3). Consequently, for Kohlberg, teaching students good habits or established moral truths was only overly simplistic sermonizing that must be reformed into child-centered approaches to teaching character (Hymowitz). Kohlberg saw no need for textbooks with morally uplifting stories, and replaced them with values clarification and self-esteem lessons. Kohlberg’s vision of educating for character matched the anti-authoritarian attitudes so indicative of the sixties’ era, and was philosophically aligned with the civil libertarians, “who sought to remove all signs of religion from the schools and who championed the civil and personal rights of students over school authorities” (Hymowitz, ¶ 3).

1960s

“The ‘turbulent 1960s’ stressed individual rights” (Krajewski & Bailey, 1999, p. 33), and replaced the emphasis on the classroom teacher as the sole moral authority held previously (Massey, 1993). Lickona (1993) observed that, “Public schools retreated from their once central role as moral and character educators” (p. 7), because of three strong forces that weakened schools’ character education efforts: personalism, pluralism, and secularization. Personalism “emphasized individual rights and freedom over responsibility, ...delegitimized moral authority, eroded belief in objective moral norms, turned people inward toward self-fulfillment, weakened social commitments (Lickona, p. 6). Pluralism surfaced the question as to whose

values would be taught in public schools, and secularization fueled the debate on whether moral education violates the separation of church and state. These philosophies added “two more barriers to achieving the moral consensus indispensable for character education in the public schools (Lickona, p. 6).

According to Massey (1993) of the ASCD, the sixties decade introduced the controversial values clarification approach which was criticized for creating classrooms considered values-free. Teachers who once could presume respect and authority now had no common character base from which to expound moral education because the new pluralistic view of society purported no common set of values (Smith, 1989). Another approach to teaching values was the cognitive-development approach. Both approaches focused on students developing personal reasoning processes based on moral judgments (Massey), but differed on how students’ personal moral reasoning was developed.

Students’ moral dilemma discussions drove cognitive development, whereas students’ self-identification of moral value beliefs drove values clarification (Massey, 1993). According to Huffman (1993), “Many public schools abandoned systematic, formal attention to character education beginning in the late 1960s” (p. 24). The roles of classroom teachers became more restrictive as moral reasoning entailed teachers serving as facilitators in the moral development enterprise. Character-building through a didactic pedagogy was replaced with teachers facilitating students resolving moral conflicts with the teacher intervening only to help students develop their morally reasoning skills. Values clarification also called for teachers to withhold the moralizing of lessons. Attempting to influence students or to share personal opinions with them was now educationally taboo (Leming, 1993b). In nothing less than a paradigm shift for the traditional role of educators, the primary role of teachers was only to help students clarify their values.

The shift is evidenced by the consideration of education’s traditional role as was observed in the “two-fold goal of the founders of William and Mary College – that youth be well educated to learning and good morals” (Education, 1968, p. 376). In contrast to withholding the moralizing

elements of lessons, the historical educational root was that moral education was synonymous with the formation of character and the instilling of good habits, and was often viewed as the proper function and responsibility of American schools (Education, 1968).

1970s

In the 1970s a renewed interest in moral education occurred evidenced by a shift away from the focus of earlier decades on assessing behavior to researchers attempting to evaluate the quality of students' thinking (Lickona, 1991b). Values clarification and moral reasoning, conceived in the sixties, became popularized in the seventies Krajewski and Bailey (1999) noted that, "The 1970s experimented with moral dilemmas and values clarification" (p. 33), and constituted the two dominant approaches for character education in the 1970s. Both with individualistic orientations reflective of the 1970s, Kohlberg's moral dilemma discussions focused on an individual's development of moral reasoning, and values clarification centered on an individual's clarification of personal values that are acted upon consistently (Lickona, 1991b). Values clarification, started by Rath and colleagues in the sixties, failed to distinguish between free choice-based personal preferences and obligatory moral values. Teachers were to maintain a value neutral and passive stance in order to promote the idea that a distinction between right and wrong did not exist (Smith, 1989). With nothing right or wrong, critics claimed that values clarification led to moral relativism. Students were urged to clarify their personal values, and then act on those values in a consistent manner.

Kohlberg focused on moral reasoning, "which is necessary but not sufficient for good character, and underestimated the school's role as a moral socializer" (Smith & Blase, 1988, p. 10). Students participated in moral dilemma discussions that were designed to develop students' moral reasoning skills. By synthesis, moral reasoning and values clarification could not and did not serve the purposes of character educators as the original proponents had planned, and according to Lasley (1997), the schools in the 1960s and 1970s assumed a value neutral stance which precipitated the need for character education in the subsequent decades of the eighties and beyond.

1980s

The decade of the eighties “witnessed the return of the school’s role in developing character” (Krajewski & Bailey, 1999, p. 33). Goals for schools in part included interpersonal understandings, citizenship, and moral and ethical character (Goodlad, 1984). The 1980s witnessed schools teaching students traditional values using new methods (Smith, 1989). Late in the decade, leaders from President Reagan to New York’s governor, Cuomo, were calling for schools to pay more attention to students’ moral development (Smith, 1989). Regarding program content, some schools in order to avoid criticisms from the extreme left or the extreme right targeted character education efforts towards determining universal values, and soliciting community-wide participation for a consensus in approaches to enact. Smith (1989) reflected the 80s decade by noting that the period was a renaissance of moral education which sought to develop both a child’s scholastic aptitude and the full flowering of their humanity. Educators understood that though every child could not be smart, every child had the potential to be good!

As the '80s decade was drawing to a close, most educators and communities focused on the traditional model of character development. According to Smith (1989), this strategy attempted to develop a: student’s character through direct instruction in positive social values, coherent school policies, a recognition system for students and schools that demonstrate good citizenship, and a consistent and firmly enforced system of discipline (p. 33).

Smith (1989) elaborated that the end of the eighties decade saw character educators focusing more on how students acted on a daily basis as opposed to their ability to reason through a moral problem.

1990s

Framing character education for the two subsequent decades, the character education that appeared at the beginning of the 1990s reintroduced a key element of character education implementation - the concept that a common set of beliefs and values exist about which consensus can be reached. Lickona (1993) set the historical tone of the 1990s observing that, “the beginning of a new character education movement, one which restores

‘good character’ to its historical place as the central desirable outcome of the school’s moral enterprise” (p. 7).

Educators have historically supported the education of the whole child (Nucci, 1989). However, to avoid charges that character education was affiliated with religious education, character educators of the century’s last decade found neutrality in limiting character discussions to an emphasis on nonreligious, universal values (Lockwood, 1997). This decade experienced resurgence in public schools for character education, specifically teaching a set of core ethical values such as honesty, kindness, respect, and responsibility in a systematic and a more direct way (Massey, 1993). A two-prong pressure was brought to bear upon schools: reducing antisocial behavior such as drug use and violence and the producing of a more respectful and responsible citizenry (Massey, 1993). Society was returning to schools charging them to transmit positive moral values by providing instruction in morals and moral behavior. Parents and policy makers supported the trend motivated by their concern that culture was not passing on its values as well as a national concern that morals were facing a steady and critical decline (Massey, 1993).

Also in the nineties, due to an ever-increasing focus on accountability and students’ test scores, some questioned character education’s legitimacy in the public school enterprise (Rusnak, 1998). Though some character study efforts have been marginalized by the emphasis on students’ test scores (Rusnak), Lockwood (1997) noted that parents are more concerned with their children’s character than SAT scores. This sentiment aligned with Lockwood’s (1991) contention that, “schooling must be more than academic work” (p. 247). However, according to Massey (1993), proponents of transmitting core values noted much support and reported positive effects on both student behavior and student achievement. Public schooling practitioners support the coexistence of both the academic and moral focus in classroom instruction. For example, Switala, curriculum director at Bethel Parks Schools in Pennsylvania, referred to members of his school system who, “believe that the power of knowledge can be harnessed by fostering the growth of the whole child” (Rusnak, 1998, p. 29).

At the close of the second millennium, Reetz and Jacobs (1999) wrote that “Once thought to be beyond the realm of public education and its intended separation of church and state, moral and character education have now come to be viewed as content for which teachers may be responsible” (p. 208). Lickona (1993), the major proponent of character education in the nineties, claimed that adherents to character education in the schools were:

Recovering the wisdom that we do share a basic morality, essential for our survival; that adults must promote this morality by teaching the young, directly and indirectly, such values as respect, responsibility, trustworthiness, fairness, caring, and civic virtue; and that these values are not merely subjective preferences but that they have objective worth and a claim on our collective conscience. (p. 9)

Lickona (1993) continued by warning that, “Not to teach children these core ethical values is a grave moral failure” (p. 9). Since 1995, through the USDE’s Partnerships in Character Education Program., the federal government has provided expanding resources and support for character education including the awarding of “97 grants to assist districts in the designing, implementing, and sustaining high-quality opportunities for students to learn and understand the importance of strong character in their lives” (USDE, 2006, ¶ 5).

Twenty First Century

The beginning of the new millennium has witnessed the rise of a variety of programs designed to help morally educate America’s public school students.

Junior Reserve Officers Training Corps (JROTC)

One popular character education effort that in essence constitutes a character-building program is Junior Reserve Officer’s Training Corps (JROTC) that is sponsored by all of the military’s branches of service. The JROTC recaptures the school’s once traditional mission to inculcate character and morals in the lives of students, and instituting such programs in secondary schools has demonstrated that character can be taught (Bulach,

2002b). According to the national headquarters of United States Army JROTC, in contrast to non-JROTC students, JROTC students nationwide attend school more, graduate at a higher rate, behave better, drop out less, and earn higher grade point averages (GPA) (United States Army JROTC Overview, 2006).

Public school administrators are called and challenged to address many new and novel educational innovations and reform efforts. National, state, and local expectations focus on several reform components that demand the public school administrators' attention including accountability for academic achievement, improvement in school climate, increased school safety, and the development of a morally-educated citizenry. School reform has precipitated expanded responsibilities and expectations for school principals (Copland, 2001). Wood and Roach (1999) recommended that "administrators should insure that adequate training takes place for teachers and parents and that appropriate curriculum materials are made available before character education is implemented into the curriculum" (p. 219).

The United States Army JROTC Overview (2006) provides a comprehensive characterization of character education that includes essential components that promote effective character program implementation:

Character education is a national movement to create schools that foster ethical, responsible and caring young people by modeling and teaching good character. The emphasis is on common values such as respect, honesty, fairness, compassion, responsibility, civility, courage and kindness. The goal is to help students develop socially, ethically and academically by infusing character development into every aspect of the school culture and curriculum. (p. 1)

Undergirding JROTC's educational efforts is the position that character education is purposeful and must be modeled and taught, focused on core values, goal-driven being centered on both character and academics, and must be inclusive of the school's entire educational program.

Social and Emotional Learning

An emerging movement originating in the late nineties with continued development in the 2000s, Social and Emotional Learning (SEL), having become a significant character education thrust, may be described as the “process of acquiring the skills to recognize and manage emotions, develop caring and concern for others, establish positive relationships, make responsible decisions, and handle challenging situations effectively” (Devaney, O’Brien, Tavegia, & Resnik, 2006, Abstract section, ¶ 1). Researchers have demonstrated that SEL’s impact on every area of children’s development, for example, students’ health, ethical development, citizenship, academic learning, as well as their motivation to achieve (Zins, Weissberg, Wang, & Walberg, 2004).

Social and Emotional Learning is the “process through which children learn to recognize and manage emotions. It allows them to understand and interact with others, to make good decisions and to behave ethically and responsibly” (Shriver & Weissberg, 2005, ¶ 2). Social and Emotional Learning constitutes a framework for systematically addressing students’ social and emotional needs (Devaney et al., 2006), and presupposes that educators need to address children’s academic performance and their emotional and social needs (Shriver & Weissberg, 2005). According to the same authors:

The best social and emotional learning programs engage not only children, but also their teachers, administrators, and parents in providing children with the information and skills that help them make ethical and sensible decisions – to avoid bullying, for instance, or to resist pressures to engage in destructive or risky behavior, such as substance abuse. (p. 1)

In the new millennium, emphasis on accountability has increased though little attention has been focused on the social context of teaching academic. According to Devaney et al. (2006):

many educators and other youth development practitioners recognize that social, emotional, and ethical skills development cannot be ignored in the name of better academic preparation, especially in the face of data showing that students are more disengaged than ever. (Abstract section, ¶ 1)

The relatively new SEL dissolves an educator's dilemma of emphasizing academics or character because the SEL character paradigm provides educators methodologies which address students' needs to be taught critical skills for school and life success, and still focus on academic goals at the same time (Devaney et al., 2006).

Social and Emotional Learning is based on the presupposition that learning is a social process impacted by teachers, families, peers, and other adults, and correlated to students' emotions which can be either resistive or facilitatory to both learning and life success (Devaney et al., 2006). Social and Emotional Learning supports educators' efforts to combine social, emotional, and academic learning, and recognizes that educators cannot dwell on preparing students academically at the expense of preparing them socially, emotionally, and ethically (Devaney et al., 2006). According to Elias (2006):

When schools implement high-quality SEL programs and approaches effectively, academic achievement of children increases, incidence of problem behaviors decreases, the relationships that surround each child are improved, and the climate of classrooms and schools changes for the better. (p. 5)

The state of Illinois in 2003 passed the Children's Mental Health Act which required the "State Board of Education to develop SEL learning standards and all school districts to incorporate them into their educational plans" (Devaney et al., 2006, Looking Toward the Future section, ¶ 2).

Low and Nelson (2005) conceptualized emotional intelligence "as a confluence of learned abilities resulting in wise behavior, high achievement and mental health (p. 41). Emotional intelligence has been linked to skill in interpersonal communication, self-management, goal achievement, personal responsibility in completing assignments, high achievement, productivity, responsible behavior, and working effectively (Low & Nelson, 2005). Thus, "emotional intelligence skills are key factors in personal, academic, and career excellence" (Low & Nelson, 2005, p. 44).

Five areas of competency frame the core foundation of students' social and emotional learning including self-awareness, responsible decision-making,

relationship skills, social awareness, and self-management. Theoretical underpinnings of character education is that these skills can be taught in the context of caring school community of caring relationships, and that intellectual, ethical, and social learning is systemically related with each dependently affecting the other (Devaney et al., 2006). Children have an intrinsic desire to learn, according to Devaney et al. (2006), when schools provide a challenging and demanding curriculum, relate learning to students' lives, and facilitate cooperative learning over competition. Such learning results in increased student learning, self-esteem, and positive relationships with fellow students, as well as students who like school and enjoy learning (Devaney et al., 2006). According to Elias (2006), "Effective, lasting academic learning and SEL are built on caring relationships and warm but challenging classroom and school environments (p. 7).

Service Learning

Service learning constitutes an opportunity for schools to engage students in activities that will promote the critical thinking about moral and ethical questions (Lickona, 1991a). In terms of student outcomes, the ultimate goal is to inspire students to become committed to moral and ethical actions, and then give them ample opportunities to practice the moral and ethical behavior students they have come to learn and believe (Lickona, 1991a).

Service learning utilizes teaching academic goals through community service where in addition to performing the particular service, students also select, plan, and reflect on the service opportunity. Ample content, skills, and content are inherent in service learning, according to Elkind and Sweet (2004), who noted that:

In addition to academic content, students practice valuable practical skills like organizing, collaborating, and problem solving. And they exercise such important character virtues as showing respect, taking responsibility, empathy, cooperation, citizenship, and persistence. Service learning is, in a word, transformative. (p. 20)

Consequently, service-learning is a "pedagogy that connects meaningful community service experiences with academic learning, personal growth,

and civic responsibility” (Frye, Lee, LeGette, Mitchell, Turner, & Vincent, 2002, p. 8).

A small sample of suggestions for possible service learning projects include peer and cross age tutoring programs, peer mediation or conflict resolution programs, parent and senior citizen volunteers, caring for the elderly or infirmed, at-risk student assistance, and school or community projects that benefit the campus facility or grounds. Miller, Leslie-Toogood, and Kaff (2005) expanded on the multiple benefits that accompany students’ community service participation noting that:

Character development programs provide vehicles to embed integrity, honesty, responsibility, restraint, and resistance skills into the daily lives of students. A philosophy of success for all, professed and implemented by every staff member, will enhance students’ self-esteem and personal power. Community service projects develop altruism, a sense of purpose, and help students develop a positive view of their future. (p. 35)

Service learning constitutes a sound investment for those persons implementing character initiatives considering that Aristotle understood values being learned through both observation and practice (Lasley, 1997). Service efforts generate effective character learning for students since observation and practice both apply when conducting community and school service projects.

Service learning is the part of school reform that connects academics to real life applications by students’ involvement in tasks and projects that require incorporation of academic knowledge and skills (Service-Learning and Character Education, 2001). Service learning allows real world opportunities where students can develop and test character traits learned in classrooms. Schools will often combine character development which is intended to produce moral and caring students with service learning which is intended to connect students to their communities and to each other. Community service programs should be developed at both the elementary and secondary levels where students reach the point that they actively demonstrate concern for others’ welfare (Huffman, 1993).

Smart and Good High Schools

The Center for the 4th and 5th Rs and the Character Education Partnership published the 2005 report *Smart and Good High Schools: Integrating Excellence and Ethics for Success in School, Work, and Beyond* views character as the “cornerstone of success in school and life” (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005, p. 69). The report includes promising classroom and schoolwide practices as well as school processes that can be utilized to create ethical learning communities (Berkowitz & Bier, 2005).

A current primer on character education is a report on a smart and good high school where the key concept is that the two great goals of education are to make students both smart and good. *Smart and Good High Schools (SGHS)* is the national report which is the result of a three-year collective effort of the Center for the 4th and 5th Rs and the Character Education Partnership. The report defined performance character (excellence) and moral character (ethics) as they related to eight strengths of character and described promising practices associated with these developmental outcomes. The report promoted a comprehensive approach to character education in schools which integrates excellence and ethics (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Major elements of the program include the Ethical Learning Community (ELC) where excellence and ethics are integrated by involving the school staff, students, parents, and the wider community, and the Professional Ethical Learning Communities (PELC) where the focus is on integrating excellence and ethics by faculty and staff collaboration. According to Lickona and Davidson (2005), the SGHS process entails the building of eight strengths of character that help youth lead productive, ethical and fulfilling lives. These eight strengths of character with accompanying promising practices will provide the foundation of a school’s concerted efforts to integrate excellence and ethics.

Value Statement Approach

One very common method of a school’s attempt to positively impact students’ character is the public posting of value statements which “tend to be a list of positive characteristics that all faculty and students can accept as desirable goals for student behavior” (Peterson & Skiba, 2001, p.170). Used most often at the elementary school level, identified value statements are:

intended to provide a school-wide base of expectations for student behavior. In some cases, these value statements are a part of a larger character-education program that includes citizenship education, social-skills instruction, and service learning (for example, the Character Counts! Program), but in other cases the set of values may not be part of such a program and may be self-standing. (Peterson & Skiba, p.170)

When discussing visual reinforcement as an element of effective character education, Brooks and Kann (1993) noted that because schools' efforts for developing character in students competes with societal messages and pressures, the "visual presentation of character values is, in effect, an advertising campaign intended to keep the words, concepts, and behaviors learned in class at the forefront of students' attention" (p. 20).

Though not generating empirical evidence regarding any measurable outcomes, schools view value statements as a methodology that cannot hurt and is the right thing to do (Peterson & Skiba, 2001). "Although these value statements may not change the attitudes or behaviors of chronically disruptive students," according to Peterson and Skiba, "they may positively affect many other students in a preventative way and provide meaning for their pro-social behavior (p. 171). In this popular character education strategy, teachers use some type of curriculum guide from which to teach character at a previously appointed time during the school day. Incorporating value states communicated via a variety of ways including posters, banners, and similar postings, focus on various character traits of the week or month. Bulach (2002a) adheres to the view that instead of a focus on certain traits, that the emphasis should instead be on the behavior traits associated with the character traits.

Developmental Assets

This approach to character education in schools centers on the "40 Developmental Assets" rubric that constitute support systems or elements of support that can be utilized by families, schools, and communities in order to fight the increased challenges posed by students' substance abuse, violence, self-directed harm, depression, and detachment from school and people. School leaders are increasingly being challenged by trying to address the impact of these problems and focus on academic accountability

standards at the same time (Miller et al., 2005). Forty developmental assets have been identified which provide protective factors for adolescents, and are strong enough to outweigh the risk factors regardless of the young person's ethnicity, ability, or income (Miller et al.).

The developmental assets are “40 scientifically based experiences, relationships, opportunities, skills, and character traits that form a foundation for healthy development” (Benson, Roehlkepartain, & Sesma, 2004, p. 1). Three important concepts according to Miller et al. (2005) drive the use of developmental assets. Also according to Miller et al. (2005), “It is imperative that school leaders, families, and communities work together to offset the teen risk factors presented by substance abuse and delinquent behaviors, changing family structures, and poverty” (p. 37). When developmental assets are enriched across schools, families, and communities systems, collective efforts “can develop resiliency, increase achievement and long-term success of adolescents, and, simultaneously, strengthen families and communities (Miller et al., 2005, p. 37). Developmental assets, according to Scales and Roehlkepartain (2003), “play an important role in increasing student achievement across all groups of students” (p. 9).

Summary of the History of Character Education

Innovation in methodology and practice continues to characterize character programming efforts on behalf of educational administrators attempting to do the supposedly impossible – balancing the demands of producing both smart and good students who will be the ethical and productive citizens of tomorrow. Forming a collective coop of instructional best practices, JROTC, SEL, SL, SGHSs, value statement approach, and developmental assets, equip current educational administrators to effectively satisfy the myriad of demands inherent to the leadership position they hold. For Ryan (2003), the early years of the 21st century saw schools recapturing their original mission, namely, the dual focus of, “helping students gain a moral compass and form the good habits they will need for a successful life” (§ 5).

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Character Education: A Critical Analysis; Robert Tatman, Stacey Edmonson, John Slate

In this article, we examine the extant literature on character education and about character education programs. Benefits of character education program are examined in terms not only of improved student behavior, but equally as important, improved student achievement. Finally, the goals of character education programs for both students and for school staff members are discussed.



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Introduction

Character education is understood as an educational reform movement concerned with the moral and ethical development of public school students within the pedagogical context of a formal character education program. Character education is used interchangeably in the current research with moral education and values education. In the *Character Education Manifesto*, Ryan, Bohlin, and Thayer (1996) maintained that “authentic educational reform in this nation begins with our response to the call for character” (§ 2). Combining brevity with profundity, Martin Luther King expounded that, “Intelligence plus character – that is the true goal of education” (United States Department of Education [USDE], 2006,

Introduction section). Secretary of Education Margaret Spellings echoed this sentiment decades later by noting that education at its best should both expand the mind and build character (USDE). Preceding both King and Spellings by several millennia, Socrates wrote that, “The right way to begin is to pay attention to the young, and make them just as good as possible” (Dorn, 2003, p. XVII).

Huffman (1995) defined character education as “planned and unplanned things that adults do to nurture the development of moral values in youngsters” (§ 2). More globally, character education constitutes an educational reform movement that addresses the “complex and significant challenge of facilitating positive character in today’s youth” (Cornett & Chant, 2000, Abstract section, ¶1). Brown and Moffett (1999) referenced the alignment of the head and heart in education noting that educators should be “making an enduring commitment to ensuring that the total child (including his or her civic, emotional, physical, and spiritual needs) is at the heart of the school renewal process” (p. 1). State and local support for values-enriched educational experiences comes from a variety of sources with several states mandating prosocial values as prerequisites for graduation (Lasley, 1997). Demonstrating the importance of character education initiatives, Lasley asserted that, “Teachers, administrators, and even parents resonate to the idea of teaching students the core values deemed essential for cultural survival” (p.654).

Character education enjoyed continued world-wide growth in the late 1990s (Lockwood, 1997; Nash, 1997). Forty-seven states and the District of Columbia had received character education funding through the U.S. Department of Education Partnerships in *Character Education Pilot Project*, and awards of \$37 million were made in the late 1990s to support communities organize character education responses to their own most compelling issues (Sherblom, 2003). At the turn of the century, character education efforts received renewed impetus through a mandate in the reform legislation known as the No Child Left Behind Act of 2001 (USDE, 2001). Addressed at the federal level in a far-sweeping reform measure, character education is now being associated with a highly qualified teaching staff, accountability and testing, annual yearly progress, and constitutionally protected prayer provisions. Through NCLB, the reauthorization of the

Elementary and Secondary Education Act of 1965, then-President George W. Bush requested an increase of funds for character education grants to states and districts to train teachers in methods of incorporating character-building lessons and activities in the classroom (USDE, 2001).

Principals from across the country possessed a federally funded mandate to incorporate character education as an integral part of schools' educational program (USDE, 2001). "Character education has been championed by President Bush and Education Secretary Rod Paige. The Education Department has backed character education programs with \$25 million in grants this fiscal year" (Latzke, 2003, ¶ 1). One of the six goals of the USDE is to "promote strong character and citizenship among our nation's youth (*Strategic Plan 2002-2007*)" (USDE, 2006, ¶ 1). State educational agencies incorporate character education into school improvement plans, state standards, official state policies such as the Quality Character Education component of Michigan's State Board of Education, and the inclusion of character efforts in school plans for Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities (USDE, 2006). State education agencies' also added to principals' responsibilities to educate students in the character domain. Character education efforts at the state level combined with the national endeavor as outlined by NCLB to frame the direction schools were to follow to ensure compliance. Governmental directives outlined district requirements for character education programs, and incentives for district compliance as well as consequences for noncompliance.

A character education effort at the state level was exemplified in a brief issued by Florida's Council for Education Policy Research and Improvement (2001) that connected character education and academic achievement. The brief purported that character education was one way whereby student academic achievement is improved. The Council for Education Policy (2001) also noted that 49 states are currently "defining their education future through the setting of rigorous academic standards, use of high stake assessment and the adoption of accountability outcome measures" (p. 1). The plan for academic achievement, however, must go beyond the triad of standards, assessment and accountability. The Council for Education Policy (2001) called for the necessity of schools to assume the dual responsibilities of student academic achievement and student

character improvement without violating church and state boundaries and without infringing upon parents' rights in raising their children. The Council noted that the educational system must support not only the development of good students but also students who become productive people and contributing citizens.

Smart and Good High Schools, a national study of American high schools, concluded, first, that a national consensus exist in America regarding the need for character which they define as doing our best work, doing the right thing, and living a life of purpose (Lickona & Davidson, 2005). Secondly, the report surmised that *Smart and Good High Schools* educate for character that includes both performance character and moral character. According to Lickona and Davidson (2005), the report's significance is evidenced at various levels including the distinction between performance character and moral character, its focus on the utilization of all aspects of school life for both performance and moral character, and the creation of a school's ethical learning community.

The ethical learning community, intended to develop collective responsibility for excellence and ethics, incorporates students, parents, the wider community, faculty, and staff. These constituents are to support and challenge each other in the dual areas of performance and character development, that is, the encouragement for everyone to do their best work and be their best ethical self. Subsumed under the faculty and staff component of the ethical learning community is the professional ethical learning community where faculty, staff, and administrators focus on continuous self-development and ongoing improvement of those practices needed to develop both performance and moral character (Lickona & Davidson, 2005).

Fullan (2001) noted that moral purpose is on the ascent in both schools and businesses, and indicated that the "best teachers integrate the intellectual, emotional, and spiritual aspects of teaching to create powerful learning communities" (p. 27). Lickona (1993) claimed that character education was making a comeback in American schools with a growing consensus that "schools cannot be ethical bystanders" (p. 6). For Houston (1998),

promoting both civility and goodness constitutes the essential work of public school leaders.

From a historical perspective, character education is as old as education itself, and comprises one of the two great goals of schools: helping people become smart and helping them become good (Lickona, 1993). Lickona observed that the early 1990s birthed the “beginnings of a new character education movement, one which restores ‘good character’ to its historical place as the central desirable outcome of the school’s moral enterprise” (p. 7). For Covey (1990) the purpose of character education is “to achieve a better balance between the development of character and intellect” (p. 92). Covey expounded on the danger of instilling knowledge without character noting that it does not make good instructional sense to focus on purely intellectual development without also focusing on a student’s internal character development. Covey warned: “As dangerous as a little knowledge is, even more dangerous is much knowledge without a strong principled character...Yet all too often in the academic world, that’s exactly what we do by not focusing on the character development of young people” (p. 89).

Character Education and Schools

The dawn of the new century saw character educators enjoying a renaissance of literature which advocated for the school’s mission to promote and conduct character education programs. Proponents of school character efforts found new programs in the first decade of the new millennium to continue the momentum built in the eighties and nineties. The focus on character education in public schools is not inconsequential. Glanzer (1997) explained that, “By giving attention to character education, public educators communicate both that there are timeless and transcendent moral values and that they desire good children as well as intelligent children” (p. 9). According to Huffman (1993), values education is an inherent part of the teaching process. For example, teachers imply values to their students by the classroom rules that are established, literature topics discussed, and how teachers relate to students.

Berkowitz and Bier (2005) noted that, “For a society to endure, it must socialize each generation of youth to embody the virtues and characteristics

that are essential to that society's survival and prosperity" (p. 64). As to the school's role, Berkowitz and Bier (2005) wrote that, "Schools, as social institutions, have long understood their sacred trust to help form each future generation of citizens" (p. 64). Noddings (2005) asserted that, "Children are moral beings; therefore, we must provide character education programs" (p. 12). Bennett (1991) exhorted schools to teach character, "If we want our children to possess the traits of character we most admire, we need to teach them what those traits are" (p. 133). Etzioni (2002) noted three principles of character education the first of which is that, "Values education is a crucial part of public education that should be fostered in schools" (p. 114). Strengthening this view, Etzioni (2002) noted that, "schools should make the development of good character one of their primary responsibilities" (p. 114). Etzioni's (2002) second principle is that, "Character-building is at the root of upholding values" (p. 114). The final principle is that, "Character education should imbue students with the full range of school experiences – the human curriculum as well as the academic curriculum" (p. 115).

The concern over America's moral condition is prompting a reevaluation of the school's role in teaching values (Lickona, 1993). The growing interest in character education had three causes: (a) the decline of the family; (b) troubling trends in youth character; and (c) recovery of shared, objectively important ethical values (Lickona, 1993). Schools are forced to deal with many problems other than curricular and programmatic ones. Monthly statistics dealing with attacks, shakedowns, robberies, attempted suicides, and gun-related crimes reflect a growing need for school-wide character education interventions. The need for character is readily visible in all areas that character education addresses. Daily school management maladies such as tardies, disrespect, insubordination, and violence lead to the larger issues of the loss of instructional time, attrition of personnel, costs of increased security staff and surveillance, and the emotional and educational well-being of students. Losses even extended to human lives in the nineties decade. Matera (2001) reported that:

Most baby boomers who grew up in the 1950s, '60s, '70s and '80s cannot recall reading about, much less experiencing a single shooting incident at an American secondary educational facility...In contrast, consider that the

National School Safety Center recorded 236 homicides and suicides on school campuses or school buses between 1992 and 1998 (p. 5).

Understandably, “Most Americans will tell you that character education is a good idea. According to pollsters, 90% of us want schools to teach core moral values” (Matera, 2001, p. 191). Huffman (1993) noted that values education is an intrinsic component of the teaching process for teachers “can’t establish classroom rules, relate to kids, or discuss a piece of literature without communicating values” (p. 24). Teachers convey values by how they treat students and by what they allow in their classrooms. This conveyance of values is especially important because of the connection between moral values and bad behavior. Kilpatrick (1992) cautioned that, “In addition to the fact that Johnny still can’t read, we are now faced with the more serious problem that he can’t tell right from wrong” (p. 14). Thus, Wynne (1986) recommended and called for the “deliberate transmission of moral values to students” (p. 4).

Berkowitz (1999) understood this growing interest to be a character education renaissance because local communities and grass roots parents’ coalitions are imploring schools and civic leaders to support the development of character in our youth. Damon (1998), Lickona (1993), and Wynne and Ryan (1993) all saw character education as a moral mandate to fight the deteriorating state of youth in our society. Educational associations at the national level also endorsed character education in schools. The National Association of Secondary School Principals (1996) noted that schools must boldly and unapologetically teach students about such key virtues such as honesty, dependability, trust, responsibility, tolerance, respect, and other commonly-held values important to Americans.

In the tradition of Dewey, education “defined the business of the educator as being the task of insuring that the ideas acquired by children and youth are so acquired that they become moving ideas, motive forces in the guidance of behavior” (Forisha & Forisha, 1976, p. 12). Ryan (1993) noted that, “While the development of a child’s character is clearly not the sole responsibility of the school, historically and legally schools have been major players in this arena” (p. 16).

Schools by nature nurture moral development because, according to Huffman (1995), “curriculum, teaching methodologies, student-teacher relations, extracurricular activities...are all value-laden” (§ 5). Value-free schools are therefore impossible.

Important steps taken by schools to educate for character include a focus on disciplinary codes that convey values, classroom rules and curricula where teachers reinforce values, and extracurricular activities in which coaches and sponsors address values through established rules for participants (Huffman, 1995).

“Character education is not a quick-fix program; it is a part of school life” (Anderson, 2000, p. 139). Concerning the persons who are responsible for reinforcing the common core character traits, Anderson (2000) understood the classroom to be the strategic place where positive character traits could be reinforced, modeled, and practiced. Thus, teachers are “central to character education” (Anderson, 2000, p. 139). Effective pedagogies require lessons to have character education embedded within instructional processes. According to Anderson (2000), the school-wide implication is that, “character education cannot be taught as a separate curriculum, but must be entwined in all curriculums” (p.140). Rivers (2004) explained that the intended audience for his discussion on character education essentials was “those who are considering character education as a meaningful part of their pedagogical objectives” (p. 247).

Doyle (1997) noted that a value-free school does not exist, and that, “The issue is not whether or not a school will have values, but what those values will be. Like or not, schools shape character (§ 14). This shaping entails a dual focus of thinking critically and behaving virtuously. For Doyle (1997), practice brings improvement in both realms, however: the most important form of practice is the exercise of being a good person. It includes such simple things as being accurate, honorable, and punctual; respecting teachers, classmates, and self: such behavior builds on the inner logic of scholarship and academic mastery – hard work, honesty, integrity. (§ 27)

Anderson (2000) associated an effective school as one where “the essence of character education is embedded throughout the curriculum and school building” (p. 139). Expanding on this concept, Anderson (2000) understood

research and pedagogy as driving the design of “effective lessons that have character education embedded within their processes” (p. 139).

Myriad reasons exist for the incorporation of character education in public schools. Josephson (2002) of the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE) noted that schools: cannot escape the fact they are inextricably engaged in character education. It’s impossible to be value neutral. What schools do and do not do, what they permit and what they prohibit, how they handle bullying, racial slurs, and cheating will have a lasting impact on youngsters. (p. 41)

Brendtro, Brokenleg, and Van Bockern (1990) defined a successful school in terms of creating and teaching a core group of values: “A successful school, like a successful business, is a cohesive community of shared values, beliefs, rituals and ceremonies. The community celebrates its saga by telling the stories of heroes and heroines who embody the core values of the community” (Brendtro et al., 1990, p. 31). Peterson and Skiba (2001) noted that “although both family and religious institutions may have more primary roles in the process, few deny that the schools may also have a role here” (p. 169). Schools convey values purposely or not (Henley, Ramsey, & Algozzine, 1999). According to Lindgren (2003), the “U.S. experience with character education ...has suggested it can alter a school’s culture, something that translates into higher (academic) achievement because teachers, rather than spending all their time on discipline, can now get on the job with teaching” (p. A8).

One vital component of a child’s education at school is values learning. Matera (2001) noted that, “Most Americans will tell you that character education in schools is a good idea. According to pollsters, 90% of us want schools to teach core moral values” (p. 191). Delattre and Russell (1993) purported that, “The development of good character cannot be separated from the basic purposes of education - to lead persons out of ignorance and helplessness so that they have the chance to lead positive, purposeful, productive lives for themselves” (p. 42). For Kilpatrick (1992), “Schools are or can be, one of the main engines of social change. They can set the tone of society in ways no other institution can match” (p. 226). Schools are in an opportunistic position to teach character and should make character

education part of their campus and district plan for reform and improvement. For Kilpatrick (1992), “The core problem facing our schools is a moral one. All the other problems derive from it. Hence, all the various attempts at school reform are unlikely to succeed unless character education is put at the top of the agenda” (p. 225). In terms of school reform, Kilpatrick (1992) asserted that “even academic reform depends on putting character first” (p. 225).

The importance of character education cannot be overstated. Doyle (1997) noted that “values are the engine that defines and drives culture” (§ 4), and that “just as children must learn to read, they must learn to be good. Like faith, morality must be acquired. The social and psychological restraints imposed by culture are what dissuade children from ‘bad’ behavior and incline them toward good” (§ 7). Doyle (1997) also poignantly wrote that to “abandon education’s historic mission to shape character - to fail to try to turn boys into men and girls into women- flies in the face of history and reason” (§ 10). Secondly, for Doyle (1997) there are good and bad values, as well as right and wrong values. Unfortunately, schools have the potential to shape character for the better or for the worse.

For Lunenburg and Ornstein (2000), “The crux of the issue can be simply stated: Should schools teach a set of values as a framework for determining, or at least influencing, subject content and its organization, broad issues and tasks, or what belief systems and attitudes should guide students’ actions?” (p. 472). Lunenburg and Ornstein (2000) advocated for schools implementing a values-centered curriculum. Schools will impact students’ character regardless if efforts are unwitting or purposefully tied to the school’s overall educational program. A disorderly school will influence students negatively just as an orderly school will influence in a positive direction (Etzioni, 1998b). Schools become better places for everyone when they are civil and caring human communities that promote, teach, celebrate and hold students and staff accountable to the values on which good character is based (Etzioni, 1998b).

Benefits Validating Character Education

According to Ryan et al. (1996), “True character education is the hinge upon which academic excellence, personal achievement, and true citizenship depend” (¶ 2). In terms of organizational management, 85% of principals studied identified ‘non-academic student behavior’, including discipline and drugs, as “significant and highly significant problems or issues in organizational management” (DiPaola & Tschannen-Moran, 2003, p. 52). However, a variety of school and student benefits have been associated with effective character education programming. For example, research demonstrating positive results of character education implementation also demonstrated a positive correlation between a school’s culture and climate and the behavior of students that is related to 16 sets of character traits (Lunenburg & Bulach, 2005). In another study, a significant positive relationship between student achievement and character scores was demonstrated (Lunenburg & Bulach, 2005). Consequently, according to Lunenburg and Bulach (2005), a school interested in high performance must make character education an integral component because a meaningful relationship exists between a school’s culture/climate, character behavior, and student achievement. “This character education program, if it is to be successful, must involve the entire school community, that is, all faculty, students, parents, and all other citizens” (Lunenburg & Bulach, 2005, p.5.2).

Thus, varied and multiple benefits provide schools ample motivations for both campus and district-wide character education implementation. Supportive groundwork for substantiating the importance of instituting character education includes the positive impact on student academic achievement, student behavior, and school-related behaviors. Determination of positive program results for character education in schools is important since, “Character education...ought to be about public, measurable, and explicit virtues with real-life, practical consequences. Character education at its best is not private and it is not for its own sake” (Rivers, 2004, p. 258). Though such determinations provide program evaluators a unique set of challenges, the level of impact made by a school’s character efforts can help counter the assertion that it is difficult to measure whether or not consistent and proper character education can help enhance academics (Achen, 2004). In the What Works in Character Education project found that several primary positive outcomes of character education included the

reduction of sexual behavior, increased socio-moral cognitive development, problem solving skills, and emotional competency, the reduction of violence, aggression, and drug use, and improved academic achievement (Character Education Partnership, 2003).

The *2005 Comprehensive Annual Report on Texas Public Schools* reported that, “About 45 % of districts surveyed reported improved local grades, and nearly 40 % reported improved standardized tests scores...Just over 66 % of districts reported fewer discipline referrals, and almost 39 % reported improved attendance” (Texas Education Agency, 2006, p. 145). According to Harms and Fritz (2001), “Research suggests a correlation between the teaching of character education of youth and its positive ethical results throughout the United States” (§ 1).

Improved Academic Achievement

Benninga, Berkowitz, Kuehn, and Smith (2003) reported that, “those schools addressing the character education of their students in a serious, well-planned manner tended also to have higher academic achievement scores” (p. 31). Ryan (2003) called for his readership to “recognize the obvious link between good character and academic achievement” (§ 8). According to Ryan (2003), “Students with the good habits that constitute good character do well in school” (§ 9).

Shriver and Weissberg (2005) related the importance of promoting students’ social and emotional skills since both are so critical to the improvement of academic performance. Shriver and Weissberg (2005) cited a study that demonstrated for the first time that social and emotional learning programs significantly improved students’ academic performance. Students participating in social and emotional learning programs have significantly better attendance, more constructive classroom behavior, less disruptive behavior, more positive feelings toward school, better grade point averages, and are less likely to incur disciplinary consequences (Shriver & Weissberg, 2005). Character education is impacting the classroom in specific subject areas such as mathematics. Latzke (2003) cited one suburban school which saw math scores rise significantly as a result of character education efforts.

The school asserted that their character education efforts contributed to their students' academic achievement.

Developing students' social skills as part of character education programs has been positively correlated to students' academic advancement (Viadero, 2003). An extensive report on health, prevention, and positive-youth-development programs by the Collaborative for Academic, Social, and Emotional Learning identified programs that demonstrated in part effectiveness in the prevention of substance abuse and improvement of academic performance (Skinner, 2004). Such results reinforce the theme that character education has to do with how successful students are in the entire school endeavor including their academic achievement (Ryan, 2003). Though debates continue regarding the best ways to measure the impact of character education on students, positive results have been documented in the literature. For example, evidence exists for the positive relationship between character education and standardized test scores.

Adding support to the connection between character education and improved academics is a Milwaukee study on character education that showed students in character education performing academically better than control students (Rusnak, 1998). A positive relationship also exists between the combination of service learning and civic education with several student variables including higher test scores, less misbehavior, and active involvement of students in their communities even into adulthood (Frye et al., 2002, p. 8). Cooperative learning benefits are noted by Lickona (1991b) who referenced various studies that found cooperative learning was effective at all levels in improving academic achievement as well as improving students' self-esteem, attitude toward school, abilities to work well with others, racial attitudes, and acceptance of handicapped students.

Improved Student Behavior

Student behavior has three focal points: students' behavior toward others which can be either positive or negative, student behavior that is self-promoting or self-destructive, and student behavior that is conducive to school success and behavior that inhibits school progress and success.

Bullying behaviors, both direct and indirect, have become the centerpiece of attention directed toward public school maladies. Ryan (2003) noted that, “Recent studies of high school students provide damning indicators of their failure to form good character” (§ 4). In 2002, a Rutgers University survey found that three-fourths of high school students surveyed admitted to cheating on a test. Ryan (2003) also referenced another 2002 study by the Josephson Institute of Ethics which found that, “nearly four out of 10 adolescents acknowledged stealing during the previous year, and 93 % confessed that they had lied to their parents” (§ 4). Ryan (2003) also reported that:

In 2001, the American Association of University Women released the results of a large-scale survey of public school students in grades 8-11. *Hostile Hallways: Bullying, Teasing, and Sexual Harassment* reported that sexual harassment happens often, and frequently right under the noses of teachers. Four out of five respondents (81 %) claimed they had experienced some form of sexual harassment in school, including unwanted kissing, sexual taunts, being touched or grabbed in a sexual way, and being forced to perform sexual acts. (§ 4)

Against a backdrop of students’ misbehavior and victimization, Ryan (2003) commented that, “Meanwhile, studies and reports of high school vandalism, violence, and promiscuity continue to catalogue disturbing behavioral trends” (§ 5).

Bulach (2002b) investigated the impact of a Junior Reserve Officer Training Corp (JROTC) program on high school students by measuring how they see or hear students performing on 96 behaviors based on 16 character traits. Bulach (2002b) found that JROTC scores were superior on 94 of the 96 behaviors. In explaining such positive results on behalf of JROTC students, Bulach (2002b) noted that, “Character education programs in the regular setting tend to be knowledge or cognitively bases while the JROTC curriculum tends to be behavior based” (p.563). He strengthens the import of his findings by positing that, “The JROTC program does improve the behaviors associated with the 16 character traits. Consequently, it can be concluded that character can be taught” (p. 563).

The behavior of students is also related to the behavior of adults with whom students have contact. Glanzer (1997) referenced one study that demonstrated that “children who observe negative models are much more likely to fall to temptation, while a model’s high standards influence a child to raise his or her standards” (p. 10). Educating a student in the character domain implies that growth occurs in students’ cognitive and behavioral areas because growth in character implies moral growth. Glanzer (1997) noted that, “Moral growth still requires that children acquire certain habits of behavior” (p. 16), and it is these habits of behavior that must be developed if students are going to sustain their moral lives. Also, student behavior is one way that character education programs can be assessed for effectiveness. For example, assessment can check measures of changes in such areas as discipline referrals, teen pregnancies, and attendance rates. In terms of students’ classroom behaviors, “Educators say incorporating character education in classes can help students perform better in academics by driving them to do their homework and avoiding negative behaviors, such as cheating on a test” (Achen, 2004, p. B2). Subsequent benefits to the school character efforts can be measured in terms of the additional time made available for classroom instruction by eliminating discipline and off-task behaviors (Achen, 2004).

A nation-wide study of school-based character education programs, considered to be the first comprehensive scientific study of character education, revealed that character efforts positively impact students’ attitudes toward adults, reduce violence, and reduce personally destructive behaviors such as drug use and sexual misbehavior (Latzke, 2003). For the research, 32 studies on successful character education programs were analyzed. Effective techniques included peer interaction and training on specific skills such as anger management or conflict resolution. The study also found that training for teachers and staff was positively correlated to more effective character programs (Latzke, 2003).

Los Angeles schools incorporating a character education curriculum utilized pre- and post-program evaluation strategies to determine program impact on relevant school behaviors such as attendance, fighting, and drug incidents. Data revealed declines in all different forms of discipline problems such as a decline in the percent of students sent to the office for

both minor and major (fighting, weapons, and drugs) discipline offenses (Lickona, 1991b). In a San Marcos character program based on a pro-abstinence perspective, known high school pregnancies dropped from 147 to 20 from the 1984-1985 school year to the 1986-1987 school year (Lickona, 1991b). Benson, Roehlkepartain, and Sesma (2004) reported that when developmental assets accumulate in students' lives, the assets are significantly related to lower levels, as well as delayed onset, of multiple forms of alcohol, tobacco, and other drug (ATOD) use and other outcomes, "regardless of young people's socioeconomic, family, or racial/ethnic background" (p. 3). Benson et al. (2004) also reported that, "the more assets youth experience, the less like they are to engage in ATOD use" (p. 3), and also noted that "developmental assets play a role in reducing all types of ATOD use" (p. 3-4). Benson et al. (2004) also listed a sundry of other benefits from developmental assets including that it is effective across diverse samples of young people, and that having more developmental assets does delay the onset of ATOD use.

Improved School-Related Behaviors

In an investigation on the effects of service-learning, one possible character education method, Scales, Blyth, Berkas, and Kielsmeier (2000) documented in the year-long middle school study that: service learning can positively affect students' social responsibility and academic success" and that results during the course of the school year also showed that service-learning students "maintained their concern for others' social welfare, whereas control students declined on those concerns. (p. 333)

In contrast to control groups, service-learning students significantly increased their belief in the efficacy of their helping behaviors, maintained the pursuit of better grades, sustained their perception that school provided personal development opportunities, and positively impacted their commitment to classwork. School-based service-learning had also demonstrated in part that participating high school students' overall grade point averages increased, students' political knowledge made gains, and attendance rates improved. The literature shows that when character

education programs are initiated, school climate also improves (Murphy, 1998).

A positive relationship also exists between character education and academics, teacher attendance rates, and student behavior. In Allen Elementary School, an inner-city school in Dayton, Ohio, students were 28th of 33 in test scores among the city's elementary schools. McIllhaney and Lickona (1996) cited an elementary school principal who in 1989 started a character education program that focused on the teaching of virtues, positively reinforcing virtuous behavior, and a parental involvement program whereby lessons and bedtime stories on virtues were discussed at home. Evaluation of this program found that, "After two years, there were measurable improvements in student behavior; teacher absenteeism also dropped. Seven years later, in 1995, Allen Elementary School was first among Dayton elementary schools in test scores" (McIllhaney & Lickona, 1996, p. 18).

According to Leming (1993b), "Several studies have shown that schools that seem to have an impact on student character will respect students, encourage student participation in the life of the school, expect students to behave responsibly, and give them the opportunity to do so" (p. 67). Matthews and Riley (1995) determined that effective character education involves students in formulating program agenda, utilizes peer interaction, and capitalizes on support from parents and the community. The importance of the school's community to effective ethics education is posited by the same authors, Matthews and Riley (1995), who advised how to avoid failure: We ensure failure if we teach ethics without using a community context to illustrate, nurture, and support ethical development. Without grounding ethics within the particular community and cultural context of the learner, ethics remain abstract, outside the scope of experiences of the learner, and ultimately irrelevant. (p. 17)

One large suburban district evaluated the impact of character education implementation on one middle school. Teachers reported significant gains in several areas including gains in academic work habits, care exhibited toward building staff, and increased participation in volunteer and citizenship projects (Brooks & Freedman, 2002). Convincing evidence,

therefore, demonstrates that schools' character education efforts do positively impact academic achievement, student behavior, and students' school-related behavior.

Goals for Character Education

In lieu of the three aforementioned benefits that justify character education's inclusion in school programs, specific goals are now outlined for character education programming and planning. Character education is everything that a school does that influences the character of their students, and includes the school's deliberate effort to help people understand, care about, and act upon core ethical values (Lickona, 1991a). In terms of the character expectations that people have on their own children, Lickona (1991a) understood that parents want their children to "be able to judge what is right, care deeply about what is right, and then do what they believe to be right-even in the face of pressure from without and temptation from within" (p. 8).

Goals for Students

The goal of character education, according to Schulman and Mekler (1994), should be that students do not exhibit character because they are being rewarded, but because they initiate a character trait on their own with the reward being a feeling of goodness as evidenced emotionally or in some aspect of their psyche. Those persons demonstrating effective character development are motivated by intrinsic reward not external benefit or reward. Noddings (2005) referenced a 1918 National Education Association report, *Cardinal Principles of Secondary Education*, that cited the great goals of education as including the seven topics of health, core academics, home, vocation, citizenship, worthy use of leisure, and ethical character – all meant to, "guide our instructional decisions" (p. 10). According to Noddings (2005), these goals are "meant to broaden our thinking – to remind us to ask *why* we have chosen certain curriculums, pedagogical methods, classroom arrangements, and learning objectives" (p. 10). That is, "Students are whole persons – not mere collections of attributes, some to be

addressed in one place and others to be addressed elsewhere” (Noddings, 2005, p. 10). Thus, for Noddings (2005), “schools must be concerned with the total development of children” (p. 11), and should not only focus on the fundamentals like reading and math.

Berreth and Scherer (1993) noted that for students to be effective and moral persons, the one psychological trait a person needs is self-control – the ability to control their impulses. “A moral person is somebody who, when he or she feels an impulse, can defer responding long enough to pass judgment about the appropriateness of that action” (p. 14). Berreth et al. (1993) included Amitai Etzioni’s quote that, “Education is character formation” (p. 14).

Elkind and Sweet (2004) suggested the following general goals for any character education program: (a) Structure a coherent and comprehensive character education effort; (b) Engage students in activities that make them think critically about moral and ethical questions; (c) Inspire students to become committed to moral and ethical actions; and, Give students ample opportunities to practice moral and ethical behavior (p. 17). Another goal of school character education programs is to make students good citizens. For Rivers (2004), “Character education is citizen education” (p. 258). The goal of such education is global in nature where citizenship virtues are applied to all aspects of civic and national life. Noting that Benjamin Franklin understood the American Revolution as an “opportunity to apply virtue to politics” (Rivers, 2004, p. 258), Rivers (2004) claimed that, “This is also the view in the later tradition of John Dewey and other American pragmatists who saw democracy as more than just a container for competing interests, but as a means for the general improvement of mankind” (Rivers, 2004, p. 258).

According to Elias (2006), parents and communities want young people to be fully literate, understand mathematics and science, possess problem-solving abilities, take responsibility for their personal health and well-being, develop effective social relationships, be caring individuals, understand how their society works, and develop good character and make sound moral decisions. Referring to these goals in a collective sense as the education of the whole child, Elias (2006) noted that children need all of these elements

in balance, and, “Since balance is necessary, efforts that elevate some factors at the expense of others are doomed to failure” (p. 5).

Goals for Faculty

Reetz and Jacobs (1999) found that, “the most frequently mentioned form of instruction regarding moral and character education among faculty was through modeling” (p. 211). As the primary agent responsible for the managerial oversight of teaching faculty, one goal building-level principals should possess is the awareness of the skill level and degree of motivation their current faculty or faculty recruits have in the character education area. In order to aid school administrators:

Teacher preparation programs need to make sure their students have opportunities to form and reflect on their own values and are well-equipped to work with their own students to help them form the character and morals they need to be contributing members of the world community. (Reetz & Jacobs, 1999, p. 212)

Teaching faculty possessing such character and morals would be in the position to positively impact their students regarding the same.

Goals for the School

Ryan (2003) noted that educators need to create a school culture of character, and that those cultures must be created, and that cultures consist of the “embodiment of the rules, procedures, mores, and expectations of a community’s people” (§ 13). Part of creating that character of culture, besides the strong mandate to teachers to facilitate students acquiring both core moral and civic values, includes a clear and well-articulated mission statement, the institution of a school language of character, and utilizing the character-integrated curriculum (Ryan, 2003). “The issues of character and civility are not merely esoteric or an add-on to the curriculum, like driver’s

education. They are central to our mission and to our very survival as an institution and a society” (Houston, 1998, Builders of Society section, ¶ 2).

Summary

Ryan’s (2003) suggested that if schools would take back their responsibility to help students gain a moral compass and form good habits, then schools could have greater academic achievements and simultaneously meet their responsibilities as educators of students’ character. The promise residing in the education of students’ character is the promise that academic goals can be attained as character goals are accomplished as noted by Ryan (2003):

Teachers must help students see that the hard, often tedious work of school is the stuff of their own character formation...Teachers must confidently make them the promise, however, that while doing this hard work of forging good character, they will be able to achieve the academic goals we have set for them. (¶ 16)

School administrators implementing character education initiatives will find both academic and character goals accomplished.

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Teach and model Morals, Values and Character

“Students remember little of what we say, but most of what we do”

Rationale

In a Yuma, Arizona elementary school located in a very poor part of the city, the faculty decided to use problem solving instead of discipline. Following the training, the faculty worked together because they wanted to ensure there was a high degree of consistency in what they were teaching the children. Several of the teachers believed a **character education program** would be beneficial in helping students learn to **problem solve** and make **better decisions**. So, they went to the Internet and downloaded several state and national **character education programs**. They then met with students and parents and decided on nine aspects of character. One aspect was highlighted each month throughout the school. They used posters, class discussions, and even had a couple of films. The teachers felt that this part of their overall program was very beneficial in attaining the results that they did.

Our students today live in a world of TV, videos, and movies. The women are degraded, male heroes are shooting or assaulting others, and the winner is the one that ends up with the most money. Many years ago in a rural middle school, the principal overheard two middle school girls talking about the popular movie Pretty Woman with Richard Gere and Julia Roberts. The one girl remarked that it was a Cinderella story. The other girl said, “I guess today if you’re going to meet a prince, you have to be a prostitute first”. Although the movie industry claims to only be entertainment, the fact is that students learn from them.

Are we down to only one value – attaining wealth, no matter how? We certainly hope not, but we do have to take a stand against the competition from the entertainment industry. It is not only our responsibility but essential if we hope to teach children to **problem solve** and make honorable decisions. The task here is to devise a means of teaching accepted values, morals, and character.

In all honesty, it is almost impossible to compete with movies and TV. It is close to a perfect learning environment. It is auditory, visual, includes emotion and action, and has the complete focus and attention of the viewer. Once a visual medium like TV becomes fully interactive, it will be the perfect learning environment. Lecture and presentation will fall short of changing the attitudes and perspectives learned from the videos and movies. The only way to win is to teach and model character and strive to get a majority of students to learn the value of character. Students typically believe their friends instead of what is said in the media, regardless of how popular a celebrity might be. So, as each student learns character, morals, and accepted values, they influence and teach other students.

The good news is that it can work. The teachers at the Yuma elementary school proved it. They included their chosen aspects of character in their student expectations. They used the nine aspects while working with the students going through the problem solving steps (This was mostly done at the **finding alternatives** and decision-making steps). Because of their efforts, in the first semester of the year before the training, 215 students were sent to the office for **misbehavior**. In the first semester of the following year, 14 students were referred to the office. The data also showed that **classroom disruptions** dropped by two-thirds.

Practical Application

Teach about morals and character when teaching students to solve their problems.

With students who have **healthy self-concepts**, you can discuss an aspect of character or moral value with defining the problem and what did you choose to do steps. But this has the potential of turning into a criticism – sort of kicking them when they are down. It is usually more positive and students are more willing to think about and discuss an aspect of character when discussing what they plan to do in the future.

Like most tasks principals and teachers have, devising something is only part of it. The next steps are to **implement, monitor, evaluate, and adjust** accordingly. If you choose to include character education, be sure it is

something you believe in. Be sure it is something that the community can believe in. Make sure you are willing to teach it, model it, and use when interacting with the students. When the students learn and accept these beliefs, your job is much, much easier.

Expected Outcomes

- Students learn more about morals, values, and character.
- Students learn to consider character prior to making decisions and taking actions.
- Principals and teachers are reminded of character and morals and begin to use them more in their work with the students.
- Inappropriate behavior is greatly reduced or eliminated.